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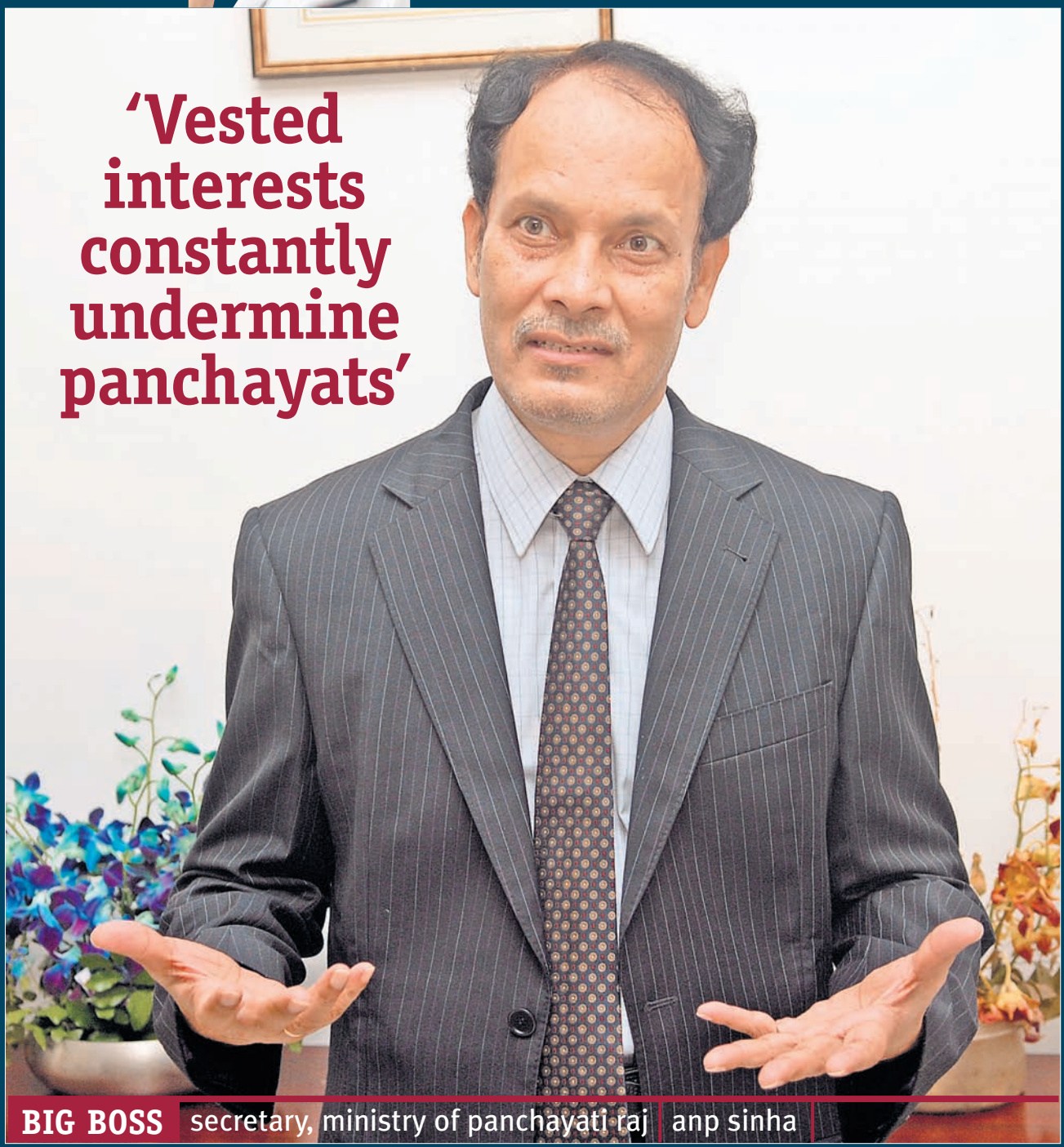

'Vested interests constantly undermine panchayats'

BIG BOSS secretary, ministry of panchayati raj | anp sinha

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COVER PIC: FOTOS4INDIA

BIG BOSS

secretary, ministry of panchayati raj | anp sinha

THE betterment of rural life is the favourite subject of ANP Sinha, the Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, who still has two-and-a-half years of service left. In 1987 he went to the UK for advanced training in social planning. Sinha was brought up mostly by his mother as his father was a busy man, working in the education department. Sinha studied at Netarhat Public School. By the time he graduated, Bihar was afire with the JP movement. He appeared for the IAS examination and cleared it in his first attempt.

The 1974-batch IAS officer has travelled a long way from serving the districts of Bihar in the late 1970s and early '80s. He joined the Central government's Food Processing Ministry as Joint Secretary in 2001. He became Secretary in July 2008.

interviewed by ANIL TYAGI

gfiles: *What has the common man got till now from the Panchayati Raj system?*

ANP Sinha: The greatest achievement of India post-Independence is grounding democracy and panchayats have played a key role in deepening democracy. I do appreciate that grounding panchayati raj is not easy, but there has been a good start and with the Constitutional amendment and the commitment shown to panchayati raj by the government things should be much better.

gfiles: *What economic and social change has panchayati raj brought in?*

ANPS: Under Article 243 (g) of the Constitution, the panchayats are supposed to plan and implement schemes for social justice and economic development. In one sense, this role has not matured. We have advised the states to do activity mapping, devolving three years for functions, funds and functionaries so that each level of the panchayat is given a very specific role, both in regard to social justice and economic development. We have also requested the Central Ministries to amend guidelines of their Centrally-sponsored schemes to ensure panchayats get the appropriate role under the principle of centrality and subsidiaries. I am hopeful

FOTOS4INDIA

'Panchayats should be given funds and functionaries, then will the dream of every Indian being taken care of be fulfilled – not through bureaucratic efforts'

gfiles
INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT

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From the Editor-in-Chief

IN modern democracies, a free, fair, and robustly competitive election is the starting point of legitimately constituted authority. But legitimacy – an arrangement that reflects the power given by popular assent to their representatives to rule – is valid only when members of bodies chosen by the people espouse the principle of the greatest good for the greatest numbers. This is the cardinal principle, indeed the holy grail, of governance adumbrated by the thinking men and women who fashioned democracy because they saw it as the preferred choice from an otherwise limited selection of alternatives.

But even this wisest of all choices constantly stands in danger of falling into the list of unacceptable alternatives if it is not backed by good governance. Without good governance, democracy cannot succeed, and without democracy good governance is often sacrificed at the altar of whimsical rule, authoritarianism, or insufferable regimentation.

But an election is itself no guarantee that those ushered into office by popular mandates necessarily reflect the popular will or the broad, good sense of the common man. It is equally important that the process that turns the democractic wheel must be fair beyond a smidgeon of doubt. In India, the process of voting had been under a cloud for years when politicians romped home through brazen booth capturing or intimidation.

When the pendulum had swung too far, a corrective mechanism within Indian democracy strengthened the institution of the Election Commission, empowered it to control and even override the bureaucracy during elections, and enforce the model code of conduct with the harshness of a Calvinist headmaster. But, as former civil servant and civil service watcher MG Devasahayam notes in this issue of *gfiles*, the reform process that is designed to engineer cleaner, fairer and more effective governance cannot rest on its laurels. It cannot stop with just the creation and empowerment of the EC. It needs to go further. He points out that various groups and petitioners have raised concerns about the infallibility of the electronic voting machines. Having initially brushed aside these doubts as invalid, the EC, to its credit, has now done a rethink when faced with the possibility that lack of due diligence on this issue would leave it open to charges that it could lose control over vital stages of the electoral process that has become the bedrock of Indian democracy.

Our writer also suggests that the EC should bring within its legitimate purview some other aspects that taint the electoral process – for instance, the crude and blatant use of money power. It could, for example, enforce provisions for countermanding elections where massive money power is being deployed under Section 123 of the Representation of the People Act.

The Devasahayam article makes several other points. It merits special attention because it provokes thought, and is a call for reflection and action on good governance, the substratum of which is the integrity of the voting system.

INDERJIT BADHWAR

LETTERS: It's time we realize that we are an economy which is treading its own way much against the tide and to a great extent undeterred by the world recession. It's time India realizes its latent potential, especially in view of the parallel economy that runs the country despite all odds. Unfortunately, not many have dared to acknowledge the existence of the parallel market which in a way has saved the nation from the worst of the crisis despite the whole world coming in its grip. Your emphasis in recognizing the

Continued on page 4

LETTERS

Continued from page 3

importance of economy instead of market oozes a rare sense and spirit of national belonging which hitherto has been missing altogether. I fully subscribe to the view that India today requires a nationalistic economic system that, with its built-in checks and balances, can set the market trend right in consonance with the pace of the economy.

Rajeev Saxena, on blog

While I agree with the low "quality" of our political leaders, to reduce it to a simple equation of "People vs Politicians" may be missing the point. The issue, I feel, is the national education levels. The majority of the people are rural, with low levels of education. Such people are likely to

vote in a feudal context, electing local feudal "authority" in the form of corrupt or criminal leaders. The average Indian does not identify with the suited and educated city slicker. Till we rectify this equation by improving education and the resultant accountability of the politician, we cannot move forward.

Xerxes on blog

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secretary, ministry of panchayati raj | anp sinha |

Continued from page 2

that in time, as and when Centrally-sponsored scheme guidelines get amended and implemented, the panchayats will have lots of responsibilities in social justice and economic development.

gfiles: *The government has just started?*

ANPS: We have been trying for the last few years. I would say the absolute implementation of the Constitutional amendment, which was passed in 1993, started in earnest during the last two to three years.

gfiles: *There was no serious effort before 1993?*

ANPS: By the Central government. It is essentially a state subject. The role of the Central government is to create enabling conditions.

gfiles: *So where have you reached?*

ANPS: In some states the grounding of panchayats is very good. Some states have made a good beginning. I would not like to name any states. Some states are not doing well and we are focusing on them.

gfiles: *You have just started working and you are observing how the states are implementing panchayati raj...*

ANPS: There are two things. One, the whole issue of governance which has many dimensions. Two, planning and implementing schemes of social justice and economic development. We have been monitoring and advising.

gfiles: *India has 6 lakh villages but only 2.36 lakh panchayats. Why this disparity?*

ANPS: We have 2.36 lakh gram panchayats but about 6000 intermediary panchayats and 600 zila parishads so the actual number would be 2.5 lakh. Villages have very diverse populations. They can be tiny or big. The main thing is the size of the panchayat. It depends on the geographical area. If you look at MP and UP, the village panchayats are fairly small. There is a dilemma. If the panchayat is too big, it loses representational character. It is unviable. The national average is 5,000 inhabitants per panchayat. The viability also depends on terrain. It is very difficult to recommend the rational. UP has 52,000 smallest panchayats. Some are very large and some are very small.

gfiles: *Mahatma Gandhi's call for gram swaraj (local self-government) got forgotten just after Independence. Will the village be a viable, forceful and commanding unit? The government is reviving that.*

ANPS: If you really want this self-governance, the gram sabha is more important than gram panchayat. My personal effort is to bring the gram sabha to centrestage. The gram panchayat is an actuary body, it has so happened that the actuary body has become too dominant and the villagers feel helpless. Our effort is to make the gram panchayat responsible to the gram sabha.

When we framed the Constitution, the gram panchayats should have been made into three-tier governance. Article 40 of the Directive Principles says the State "shall" empower the panchayats. In 243(g) the word has become "may". Our society was so fragmented and fractious the fathers of the Constitution must have thought that was not the best time but in retrospect I feel it was the best time to empower the village. Also, the political leadership and bureaucracy resist the devolution of three tiers. Both the Central and state governments have not built the capacity of panchayats. Unless you provide them reasonable buildings, essential manpower, essential infrastructure, how will they really function? This year our agenda is to provide these capacities to panchayats.

gfiles: *There was a fund to build the capacities but you did not use it.*

ANPS: First, the funding is of low magnitude. Second, take the example of the Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF) –

PHOTOS: SHARAD SAXENA

'Both the Central and state governments have not built the capacity of panchayats. Unless you provide them reasonable buildings, essential manpower, essential infrastructure, how will they really function?'

our flagship programme. It is in 250 districts and is involved with the kind of work left entirely to panchayats. They give priority to their daily needs, like a link road or drinking water source or anganwadi. Capacity building got neglected. Therefore, our main agenda is to give priority to capacity building.

gfiles: *In the allocation of funds under BRGF, you have less funds for capacity utilization. Why?*

ANPS: Last year, under BRGF the allocation was Rs 4,670 crore for 250 backward districts. Because of capacity constraints, the expenditure was Rs 3,890 crore. So our system cannot absorb funds in a meaningful manner. We can't blame anybody.

gfiles: *How do you distribute BRGF funds when you don't keep track of the utilization?*

ANPS: BRGF has two components – untied development grant for development and capacity building. The latter is allocated as Rs 1 crore per district. This does not go to the panchayat, it is up to the state government how to utilize it.

BRGF has three basic objectives. One, build capacity of panchayats, under which the government allocates Rs 250 crore annually for 250 districts. Second, allocate the untied development grants to bridge the gap which remains unfulfilled by the existing schemes. Most important, there has to be participatory bottom planning. If you look at what is happening now, there are schemes for every purpose like primary education, total sanitation, drinking water etc. The feeling is that these are sectoral departments, they all plan in isolation and there is no convergence. Unless you plan in a convergent manner, you are not going to get results. At the grass-root level, how will you ensure teachers are present in schools, health staff is present in respective centres etc. The general feeling is that the present hierarchy is not able to ensure this. Our hope was that BRGF will create a conducive atmosphere for decentralized planning so that all schemes converge and produce a better outcome.

gfiles: *What is the ground reality regarding panchayats?*

ANPS: In some states, it is very good. Of course, that needs to be backed because vested interests constantly undermine the position of panchayats. In many states, panchayat culture is yet to start. The panchayat is formed but empowerment through three-tier devolution and capacity building has not taken place.

gfiles: *Are you building panchayat ghars this year?*

ANPS: We plan to build satisfactory panchayat ghars in all panchayats within three to five years. You may have a panchayat ghar in one room, but that should have sufficient accommodation facility. One room is not a panchayat ghar. There should be rooms for officials, records, computer operator. We have a scheme to connect all villages through e-governance. The government will give computer facility and connectivity. It will be a powerful method ensuring transparency.

gfiles: *This relates to government policy but is there any substantial gain on the ground regarding economic conditions?*

ANPS: The BRGF philosophy is to mitigate regional disparity. The state government is supposed to pinpoint backwardness when disbursing its funds. Suppose Bihar gets Rs 500 crore a year. Where should this money go, in which village, for what purpose? The state government has to devise very good norms to see that these funds go to villages or for schemes meant for backward people. One may argue that the funds are not sufficient to mitigate the backwardness.

gfiles: *You have launched many schemes – Yuva Khel Abhiyan, Panchayat Youth Abhiyan, Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan, etc. How much have they achieved?*

ANPS: The Khel Abhiyan is not a panchayati abhiyan. Panchayat Youth Abhiyan is our programme and it has not taken off. Our focus has been Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan. We have a scheme to raise consciousness among women representatives, enable them to create a charter of demands, pursue that charter, ensure the training of those women. Somehow we have not succeeded in this. We have proposed

modifying the scheme.

gfiles: *How does the Government of India visualize villagers' needs?*

ANPS: We have a plan for every need – *bijli, sadak, pani*, health, education, sanitation, nutrition. The question is, in spite of 50 years of planning, what is the extent of the poverty and deprivation? Until we treat panchayats as three-tier governance and ensure disintegrated participatory planning and pool our resources through panchayats, we won't be able to achieve our targets in the near future. Panchayats should be given funds and functionaries, then will the dream of every Indian being taken care of be fulfilled – not through the bureaucratic hierarchical efforts.

gfiles: *Do you have a social audit system to evaluate your schemes?*

ANPS: Two things. Collectors are not monitoring panchayats. In states where the panchayati raj system is weak, the state government has to depend on collectors for implementing their programmes. And, there are many states, including Kerala, Maharashtra and West Bengal, where panchayats are autonomous in their domains.

gfiles: *When the panchayat is autonomous, who is the governing agency?*

ANPS: In Kerala, there is a provision for an ombudsman. It is up to the state what provision it makes, whether it gives power to the Secretary, Panchayati Raj, the Divisional Commissioner or ombudsman.

gfiles: *How do funds reach the village?*

ANPS: There are three options. One, being a federal structure, funding goes from the Central to the state consolidated fund. Second, the states have created a number of special purpose vehicles like state societies, district societies. Funds go directly to them and down the line. Third could be funds going directly to panchayats from the Centre.

The second method is dominant. To my mind, it is not the correct one because states have been diverting the funds. The funds should go to the state consolidated fund and the state should follow financial discipline. Sending funds directly to panchayats is not feasible. With electronic systems, the states can transfer to panchayats.

'In many states, panchayat culture is yet to start. The panchayat is formed but empowerment through three-tier devolution and capacity building has not taken place'

gfiles: *How much money is required to ameliorate the condition of panchayats?*

ANPS: We have a Rs 4,780-crore outlay. Under BRGF, we have Rs 4,670 crore and Rs 110 crore for other schemes put together. It is too little. BRGF is highly process-intensive. Under the guidelines all funds have to make an integrated convergent participatory plan. Consolidation is by the District Planning Committee. It goes to the high-powered committee to be headed by the Chief Secretary. The process lies in preparing the plan of each panchayat. There is delay in releasing the funds.

gfiles: *There is talk of reserving 50 per cent seats in panchayats for women. What is the rationale? When will it happen?*

ANPS: The President of India said in a speech the women in panchayats are the future leaders. We are bringing the Bill in during the next Parliament session. We have 28 lakh panchayat functionaries. One-third are women, and 80 per cent of women belong to SC/ST. After the Bill is passed, women functionaries will number 14 lakh.

gfiles: *What is your model for* gram swaraj*?*

ANPS: My model would be to devolve all 29 functions listed in the Eleventh Schedule and give them funds and functionaries. The issues of vested interests opposing such devolution and capacities of panchayats have to be addressed. That is our responsibility.

gfiles: *What three things do you want to do in this year?*

ANPS: Implement e-governance in panchayati raj. Second, accounting systems in panchayats need modernization. Third is training programmes.

gfiles: *When will we see* gram swaraj*?*

ANPS: If the states and Centre decide collectively today, in five years. g

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Raja's days numbered
dmk riled at graft charges

UNION Communications and Information Technology Minister A Raja appears to be increasingly becoming a liability for the DMK, a major ally of the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre. It is likely that whenever Prime Minister Manmohan Singh undertakes an expansion-cum-reshuffle of the Cabinet, Raja will be axed and DMK supremo M Karunanidhi's daughter, Kanimozhi, will succeed him.

The charges of corruption and various other irregularities against Raja are becoming highly embarrassing for the Dravidian party ruling Tamil Nadu. Karunanidhi's son, MK Azhagiri, who is Minister for Fertilizers in the UPA Cabinet, has suggested that Raja be dispensed with. Kanimozhi, who had stepped aside in order to make way for Raja to become Minister, now does not seem averse to her brother's recommendation.

For all practical purposes, it seems only a matter of time before Kanimozhi becomes a Union Minister. When she does, the Karunanidhi family will have the distinction of having not only a brother and sister but also another close relative in Dayanidhi Maran serving simultaneously in the Union Council of Ministers.

Sonia, Press Club member
journos await madam

THE members of the Delhi Press Club – which calls itself the Press Club of India, to the chagrin of other press clubs around the country – are waiting for the day when Sonia Gandhi will call on them and perhaps have *nimbu-paani* on the lawn, while her securitymen glare at everyone around. Though the capital's journos are used to having VVIPs amidst them in the relaxing atmosphere of the club, they are currently thrilled no end with having secured madam's membership.

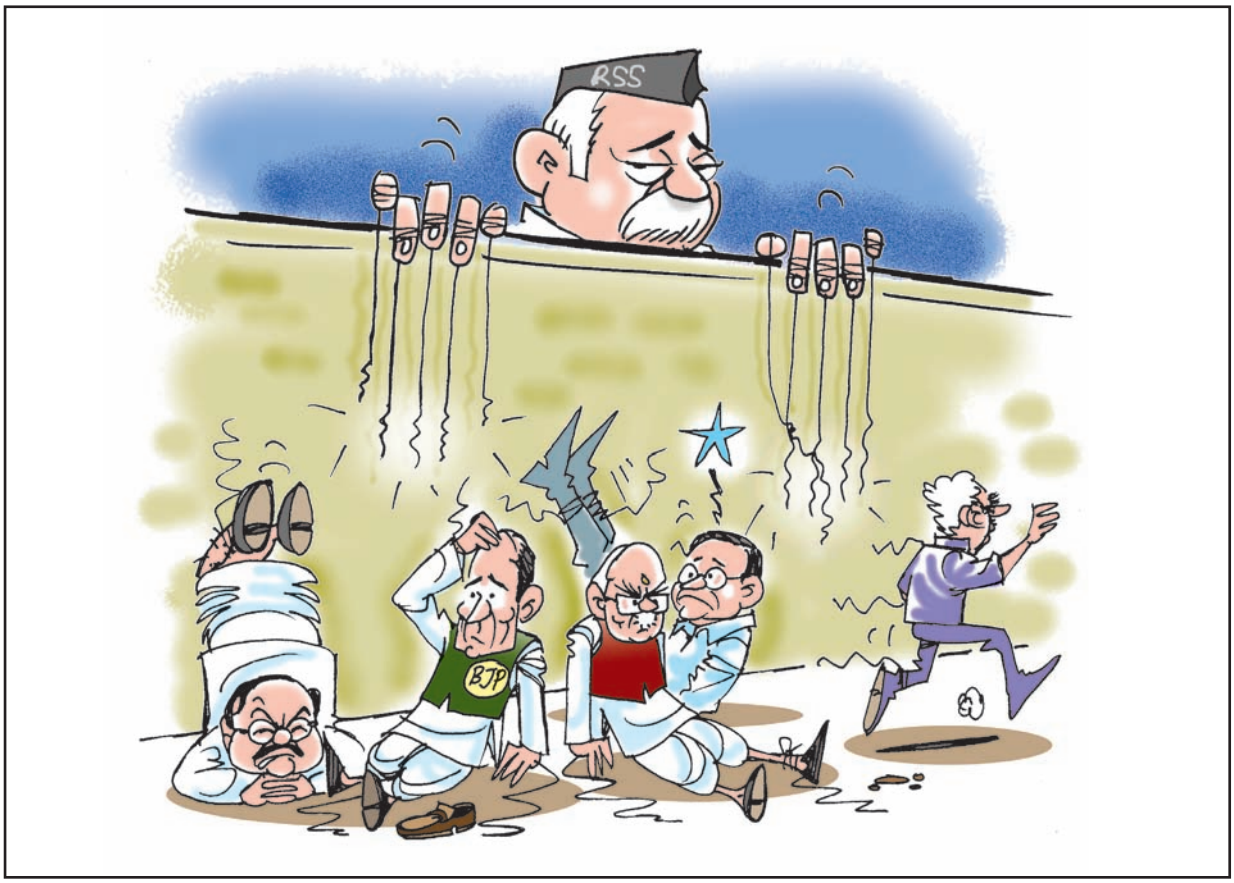
The coup was achieved when the club officials went to meet her at 10, Janpath and, after a good deal of conversation, proposed that she become a member of the club. It is said that, interpreting her smile as an assent, they completed the paperwork and handed her the membership card on the spot.

And then the notice announcing the new membership appeared on the board. However, before the officials could celebrate their feat in a befitting manner, they were dislodged from their posts by a general body meeting. What remains an enigma is how the Congress president reacted to this development. She was probably not surprised, being familiar with the perils of democracy.

Family quarrel in Chennai
Karunanidhi progeny at war

AND, while the DMK fights its battle on the Raja front, it seems there is trouble brewing within the Karunanidhi family. There are interesting recent developments in Chennai. On at least five days, Karunanidhi skipped going to one of the two houses that he always visits daily.

The city has been agog with speculation that Karunanidhi has disapproved of a serious tiff between the step- brothers and sisters. The situation apparently became so serious that his wife, who had failed to get him on the phone for some time, dis-



ILLUSTRATIONS: ARUNA

cussed the matter immediately when she finally met him. She reportedly asked him to distribute all the assets due to their children to avoid an unsavoury situation and bitter infighting later.

Waiting for manna
officer turns limpet

A 1974-batch IAS officer of the Jharkhand cadre, Rahul Sarin, who was Secretary in the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, retired in August – well after he should have vacated the office. He had been appointed Member of the Competition Appellate Tribunal on May 14 this year. The committee that selected the tribunal members was headed by Chief Justice of India KG Balakrishnan and included the Law and Corporate Affairs Secretaries as members. An officer appointed by this august body is expected to follow its orders in letter and spirit and Sarin should have quit his office and joined the tribunal at once. However, he continued as Secretary, setting off murmurs in North Block corridors.

Now, it has come to be known that he was waiting to be appointed a member of the Union Public Service Commission, as the Appellate Tribunal does not have much work. Also, former Supreme Court judge Arijit Pasayat is Chairman of the tribunal, so Sarin would have been second fiddle there. The question is, who allowed him to continue as Secretary, Personnel after the order of his appointment had come? g

WHO'S THE BIGGEST TROJAN?

Flawed EVMs or money power, the Election Commission is shutting its eyes to solutions

by MG Devasahayam

WEEKS before the election to the 15th Lok Sabha, the Election Commission of India received a severe jolt when the then Chief Election Commissioner, N Gopalasami, wrote a lengthy missive to the President of India, levelling serious allegations against his colleague and Election Commissioner Navin Chawla and seeking his removal. This was ignored and Navin Chawla was elevated as the CEC in the midst of elections. Three out of the five phases of the election were held under his stewardship and the ruling UPA returned to power.

Within days, the Election Commission was flooded with complaints from political parties, NGOs and individuals alleging massive use of money power to purchase votes (up to Rs 70 crore in some constituencies, paid out over several days) and hacking/tampering of the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). The EC's response was ostrich-like.

Then followed the open admission to money power by three election bigwigs, past and present – Gopalasami, Election Commissioner SY Quraishi, and Naresh Gupta, long-serving chief electoral officer of Tamil Nadu. Gopalasami set the tone while addressing a select gathering in Chennai: "EVMs cannot be hacked as being alleged because these are stand-alone equipment and not connected to any operating system. We have met party muscle power with state gun power by deploying armed Central police force in polling booths. But we cannot counter money power in a similar manner."

He conceded that, though EVMs could not be hacked or tampered with, "booth capturing and bogus voting is very much possible and very much prevalent". The statements of Quraishi and Gupta were on the same lines, thus creating a credibility crisis about the EC and the electoral process.

Next came the Supreme Court direction to election watchdog NGO Jan Chaitanya Vedika to approach the Commission in the matter of integrity of the electronic system. Three High Courts – Madras, Bombay and Madhya Pradesh – also issued similar directives to parties who approached them.

The EC hurriedly summoned the complainants to demonstrate the "tamperability" of EVMs on its premises between August 3 and 8 with a caveat: "Commission is sure of its non-tamperability. EVMs are fully tamper-proof". This amply evidenced a closed mindset.

Though not all parties appeared, the EC went ahead. A hundred EVM samples, obtained on random basis from various states, were kept at the Commission's office in the presence of a "technical experts group" as well as engineers representing the EVM manufacturers – BEL and ECIL.

Brushing aside objections from political parties and individuals, the EC foreclosed the issue with a press statement on August 8: "The Election Commission would like to underline that it always had a firm conviction and complete satisfaction that EVMs could not be tampered with....What has been demonstrated or claimed to have been demonstrated is on a privately assembled lookalike of ECI-EVMs and not the actual ECI-EVM." Nevertheless, in subsequent presentations by the NGO and representation from some parties and individuals, the "infallibility" of the EVMs was shown up *(see box)*.

Under the paper ballot system, the EC had total control over all stages of the electoral process. Election agents had the facility of looking inside ballot boxes. Voters had the satisfaction of checking the accuracy of the ballot paper before marking it and verifying whether he/she had correctly marked it. Reconstruction of the vote for authentication in case of electoral dispute was possible.

Under the electronic voting system, the EC seems to have lost control over vital stages of the electoral process. External agencies undertaking the critical tasks as described above could be replete with mischief and manipulation, raising all kinds of suspicion about the

It may be true that party money power cannot be physically countered by state money power. But by creating fear in the minds of the corrupters, the EC can certainly fight it

REUTERS

Tamper-proof' EVMs – A falsity

ECIL- and BEL-manufactured EVMs use 8-Bit Chip. Software – also developed by these companies – is sent to factories in Japan and the US for fusing the code into the chip. The process of sending the code is non-transparent and there is every possibility for swapping of the code and insertion of a Trojan, which can be subsequently activated to manipulate the machine. As yet there is no mechanism or method to verify whether the chip used in the voting machines contains the original code or not. After the chips are fused with the software code, they are shipped back to ECIL or BEL, who then plant them into the EVMs they make. There is no certainty as to the origin, reliability, security and integrity of the agencies handling the software and the chips.

These chips can also be procured from the same manufacturer with the original code along with the Trojan in it through the distributor or his agent or some other means. These chips with the manipulated code can be delivered to the manufacturer of EVMs as if they are original chips. After the fusion of software, the chips are masked. There is no way masked chips can be read, even by the manufacturer. So it is not possible for BEL/ECIL to check them except through a functionality test.

A functionality test cannot in any way find out if a Trojan has been introduced, maliciously or otherwise, in the software by the company that masked the chips. The Election Commission never checked the software of the machines. All these flaws and deficiencies make switching of votes during polls or hacking/manipulating the results a distinct possibility.

integrity of the electoral process. Neither the election agents nor the voters have the facility and satisfaction of scrutinizing the ballot boxes and ballot papers prior to and during the casting of the vote. And there is no physical reconstruction of the vote in case of dispute.

Having realized the seriousness of the issues involved, the EC has relented and agreed to look at the matter afresh with an open mind. This is a welcome step, for this is the first time in independent India that the electoral process and election mechanism have come under such strong suspicion and challenge. The oft-stated idiom that Caesar's wife must be above suspicion applies to the EC and the burden of proving the integrity of the electronic voting system in an open and transparent manner rests squarely with the Commission. The EC would do well to set up a committee of independent experts comprising EC and party nominees, to go into the issue of tamperability of EVMs. To facilitate organized and transparent functioning of the committee, the EC should draft appropriate guidelines in consultation with parties.

EQUALLY serious is the devastation caused by money power. It may be true that party money power cannot be physically countered by state money power. But by creating fear in the minds of the corrupters, the EC can certainly fight it. It is difficult to believe that, with the vast contingent of observers with video and still cameras deployed by the Commission, it does not get actionable evidence of such largescale bribery, which even the common man knows about. Why then is the EC passive and inactive?

Why can't the EC countermand elections in constituencies where massive money power is being deployed, as described in Section 123 of the Representation of the People Act? It would send shivers down the spine of the cash-and-carry candidates. Is it the failure of the EC or the much celebrated band of observers who do not seem to be doing anything worthwhile?

As of now, provision for countermanding under Section 59 A 2(b) of the Act is available for booth capturing which covers the physical act of taking possession of polling stations, ballot boxes/EVMs or ballot papers because of which the result of the election is likely to be affected. Since proven pre-poll vote purchase would also have the same result, there is nothing wrong in invoking this strong psychological weapon to make the elections free and fair. If need be, the Act could be suitably amended without delay. g

The great India

India does not have a strategy on how to handle the Myanmarese people's struggle fo

by Col R Hariharan

INDIA'S signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with ASEAN, the country's fourth largest trading partner, on August 13 should be considered a major success of the "Look East Policy". The FTA, coming into force from 2010, will dismantle trade barriers over the next six years and boost two-way trade with the region considered by China as its backyard. It could also strengthen our strategic ties with Singapore, Japan and Vietnam.

At the same time, another seemingly unconnected event in ASEAN – in Myanmar – exposed the soft underbelly of India's foreign policy. On August 11, a Yangon court sentenced Aung San Suu Kyi, the iconic leader of Myanmar's struggle for restoration of democracy, to three years hard labour for allowing a mentally deranged American intruder to stay in her home. The court ignored her plea that she had no control over the security of the house where she had been under house arrest for nearly 14 years. However, Senior General Than Shwe, head of the ruling military junta, in an act lauded by the state media as a humanitarian gesture, reduced the sentence to 18 months of house arrest!

The conviction of Suu Kyi was clearly another perverse act of the military junta to keep her from participating in the general election proposed to be held in 2010 under the country's new Constitution. The Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) swept the last election in 1990, nearly ending the military rule. The junta did not allow the civilian government to take over. The

The Ministry of External Affairs spokesman did not even voice India's disappointment, let alone condemnation of the conviction. He only said, '….India has emphasized to the Government of Myanmar the need to expedite their political reform and national reconciliation process and has noted the various steps taken so far..'

n NON-SPEAK

le for democracy while maintaining functional relations with the military regime

REUTERS

Kyi with junta bosses: smiles, then jail

latest sentencing of Suu Kyi only confirms that it had no intention of allowing a government under her leadership even after the 2010 election.

The conviction of Suu Kyi was universally condemned except for China, which has been the chief patron of the military regime. Even ASEAN, led by Thailand, sought her release and participation in the elections. India's reaction was muted, apologetic and inane.

The Ministry of External Affairs spokesman did not even voice India's disappointment, let alone condemnation of the conviction. He only said, "We have seen reports of the sentencing of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar for a period of 18 months....India has emphasized to the Government of Myanmar the need to expedite their political reform and national reconciliation process and has noted the various steps taken so far by the Government of Myanmar in this direction."

What does this kind of "non-speak" (I suppose the coinage will do, like "non-paper") mean? India does not have a proactive strategy on how to handle the Myanmarese people's struggle for restoration of democracy while maintaining functional relations with the military regime.

The xenophobic founder of military rule, General Ne Win, turned the nation into an international recluse during his regime from 1962 to 1988. However, his successors had to come to terms with the changes in global environment at the end of the Cold War and ushering in of economic liberalization. After the 1990 elections, the junta cracked down on the people to prevent restoration of civilian rule. An international outcry resulted. To ward off this and to retain its hold on power, the junta had to find support, particularly from its neighbours and in Southeast Asia. This prompted Myanmar's joining ASEAN and developing strong relations with its neighbours.

The military regime has successfully weathered international sanctions, internal and international protests, insurgencies and international media hostility for over two decades. Its survival strategy is based on tackling threats coming from three quarters: restoration of democracy, ethnic insurgency and the international community helping the opposition. Its three neighbours – China, India and Thailand – have been mustered to play a key role in the junta's survival.

GEO-STRATEGIC realities have compelled the three neighbours to evolve their own strategies in handling the military regime. While China is wholly supportive of the military rulers, Thailand and India have adopted "constructive cooperation" with the regime in the hope that persuasive methods rather than sanctions will help restoration of democracy.

The regime has also been facing economic sanctions and embargos imposed by the US and the EU. To reduce their impact, it has leveraged Myanmar's oil, gas and mineral resources to advantage by creating a network of supportive nations like Japan, Korea, India and ASEAN, apart from China. This has also helped the regime to divide and weaken the anti-junta lobby in the UN.

Strategically, there are three imperatives to be considered. The army, well entrenched in power, with a strength of

REUTERS

Democracy supporters: unending repression

over 430,000 troops, is the second biggest in Southeast Asia. It is unlikely to give up power in the near term; even the 2008 Constitution provides for a permanent overlordship of the army in the multiparty democracy. There is also a distinct possibility of Myanmar emerging as a potential nuclear power like North Korea, if the military rule continues for another decade.

Second, China has established a stranglehold. Its influence permeates the strategic, economic, and social facets of the country. China considers Myanmar an important part of its strategic domain. China has better and easier land access to Myanmar than India. The country's abundant natural resources, including oil and gas, are important to China. It also provides China direct access to the Indian Ocean bypassing the bottleneck at the Malacca Strait. Most important, Myanmar provides a direct approach to India's vulnerable Northeast directly from mainland China. China has assiduously cultivated the military regime and, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, saved the military junta by blocking international action against it. Given this setting, with two decades of a headstart, China's influence is likely to continue over Myanmar even after a civilian government comes to power.

LASTLY, the nation's experience in multiparty democracy in the initial 14 years after independence was disastrous. Corruption, groupism, warlordism and inept political leadership gave rise to political instability and encouraged the spread of powerful ethnic insurgencies, particularly of Karnes, Shans and Kachins as well as Communists. It paved the way for military takeover. Nearly 40 years of military rule has prevented emergence of competent political leadership. Suu Kyi is probably the only charismatic leader to unite and lead the splintered political parties. These destabilizing elements will be very much there even when democracy is restored.

India has to go beyond perpetuating the military regime, and invest in the people. It has to project itself as a worthy partner who can help Myanmar in its well-being and long-term growth

India's Myanmar policy is an outcrop of its Look East Policy. So it tends to see Myanmar in the context of ASEAN with emphasis on economic and developmental issues. Strategic objectives in Myanmar appear to be limited to reducing Chinese influence and eliminating sanctuaries of insurgents from India's Northeast. Thus Myanmar appears to have been reduced to a marginal role in India's national security matrix. Given these shortcomings, its policy has floundered in satisfying neither India nor Myanmar.

If India aspires to be even a regional power it has to build sustainable valuable-based relations with Myanmar with a strategic content. It has to go beyond perpetuating the military regime, and invest in the people. It has to project itself as a worthy partner who can help Myanmar in its well-being and long-term growth. So far, India's well-meaning efforts in Myanmar have been limited to developing infrastructure as part of improving access to the ASEAN region. Even these efforts have been tardy and slow.

The basic problem of our policymakers appears to lie in articulation of power with all our neighbours. It is good to remember Prof Morgenthau's prescription on handling power: "Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man. Thus power covers all social relationships which serve that end, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls the other...For if we look at all nations, our own included, as political entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power, we are able to do justice to all of them...we are then capable of pursuing policies that respect the interests of other nations, while protecting and promoting our own." [*Politics Among Nations*, pp 9-11]. Are we articulating this kind of power?

In this context, what the maverick Marxist historian, Professor DD Kosambi, wrote about making the buffalo rather than the tiger our national animal comes to mind. In his book on the history of India, he said the buffalo is thick-skinned, revels in muck and anybody can milk it (or words to this effect). g

(The writer is a top intelligence analyst)

सेल SAIL

The Country Trusts SAIL Steel

SAIL has supplied over 14000 metric tonnes of steel for the Worli-Bandra Sea link

Since its inception SAIL has significantly contributed in the development of all major infrastructure in the country. SAIL steel has been and presently is being used in several projects of national importance. A few are listed below:

Chandrayaan – SAIL supplied steel for tanks used to store liquid propellant in the Reaction Control System package of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) which carried the Chandrayaan-1 satellite into space.

Mumbai Airport – M/s GMR has entrusted the job of modernisation of Mumbai Airport to Pratibha Pipes & Structurals Pvt. Ltd. who have completed a major portion of the job using Plates and SAIL TMT.

Shivalik – Specially toughened warship grade SAIL steel was used in the Shivalik, the first Indian warship to be made with Indian steel.

J&K Railway Line – This 340-km-long railway line will join the Kashmir valley with the Indian Railways network. The project area falls in seismic zone-V. SAIL steel is being used because of its reliability and durability.

Power Projects – SAIL is supplying various steel products, for major thermal and hydro power projects such as Barh, Chandrapur, Mejia, Dadri, Jhajjar, Simhadri, Lower Subansiri etc. It is primarily supplying plates, SAIL TMT bars and structurals among other products.

Worli-Bandra Sea link – Promoted by Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation, this link connects the island city of Mumbai with its western suburbs.

SAIL has supplied over 14000 metric tonnes of steel for this project.

Delhi Metro – Delhi Metro has become the pride of nation's capital within a very short time. SAIL is proud to be a contributor in making of this metro-marvel.

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Irrigation Development – SAIL has provided various sizes and grades of steel for several irrigation projects across the country such as Tapi, Indirasagar, Rajivsagar, among others.

Steel Plants – Most upcoming green-field and brown-field steel plants are depending on SAIL steel for their construction.

Windmills – Suzlon, a renowned name in windmills, is using SAIL steel for setting up wind-mills in Maharashtra and other regions in India. Plate mill plates in sizes varying from 10 to 40 mm are being used for the wind-mills.

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The IAF's BILLIO

India goes fighter plane shopping to offset the

by Radhakrishna Rao

A no-holds-barred race to bag what is billed as the biggest Indian defence order ever has taken off. And the dogfight to grab the contract for the supply of 126 medium multi-role combat aircraft (MMRCA) whose worth could easily exceed $1 billion has begun with the twin-engined Super Hornet F/A-18E/F of American defence and aerospace giant Boeing displaying its awesome manoeuvres and breathtaking stunts across the skies of Bangalore, the aerospace capital of the country. Bangalore skies will also witness the roar and thunder of the five other contending aircraft in a sequential and phased manner. The six fighter planes in the race for the MMRCA contract will also be evaluated under the hot conditions of Jaisalmer and the cold conditions of Leh on a "no cost, no commitment" basis. "The performance of the aircraft under various stages including their take-off and landing, their manoeuvring capability as well as their operational efficiency under hot weather and cold weather conditions will be evaluated," said an IAF official.

To evaluate the performance of the contending aircraft from a variety of angles and under varying environmental and climatic conditions, a multi-disciplinary team of experts drawn from ASTE (Aircraft Systems and Training Establishment) of the Indian Air Force, CEMILAC (Centre for Military Airworthiness Certification) of the Government of India-owned Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and the state-owned aeronautical and defence major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) has been set up. The six competing fighter jets are: F/A-18E/F Super Hornet of Boeing, F-16IN Fighting Falcon of Lockheed Martin, Rafale of French aviation major Dassault, Russian MiG-35, Eurofighter Typhoon and Saab Gripen. "MMRCA is fascinating because it represents an enormous choice for IAF and perhaps India. It is between continued reliance on Russian equipment with low purchase costs but with high life cycle costs and a move towards western equipment which costs more to buy but is less expensive to operate and more reliable in the long run," says Richard Aboulafia, Vice-President of Analysis at Teal Group.

Once the rigorous trials and flight performance evaluation in the Indian locations are over, the aircraft will be ready for carrying out actual weapons firing trials that can take place either in the country where the aircraft is produced or in a country suggested by the aircraft manufacturer. This will be the final and most critical phase of the aircraft evaluation preceding the identifi-

While 18 aircraft will be made available in flyaway condition, the rest of the 108 will be licence manufactured by HAL. The first aircraft will be supplied within 36 months and the 18th within 48 months

MiG-35

F-16IN Fighting Falcon

) N DOLLAR deal

e phasing out of its MiGs

cation of the flying machine for final selection. All these procedures are expected to be completed by the first half of the next year.

Indian pilots have already undergone training for the competing aircraft in the country of production. The exhaustive technical evaluation of the bids offered by the six aircraft vendors was completed early this year. The Request for Proposal (RFP) for MMRCA issued in August 2007 has a provision whereby India can exercise the option of acquiring another lot of 63 aircraft in the future without cost escalation. But, as pointed out by IAF Chief PV Naik, "The acquisition of more aircraft would be assessed at an appropriate time based on our experience and requirements." As stated by Indian defence analysts, the MMRCA, which pits the world's leading combat jet manufacturers against one another, could provide a new direction to India's high-ticket defence procurement programmes of the future.

ONCE all the formalities are successfully completed and the aircraft identified for acquisition, commercial negotiations will commence. However, the zeroing in on the final vendor will be the responsibility of the Cabinet Committee on Security headed by the Prime Minister. "It is a political decision taken after considering the strategic and geopolitical conditions," said a government official in New Delhi. While 18 aircraft will be made available in flyaway condition, the rest of the 108 will be licence manufactured by HAL. The first aircraft will be supplied within 36 months of the contract being signed and the 18th within 48 months. The 19th aircraft at HAL will be produced within 54 months of the signing.

Meanwhile, the no-nonsense Defence Minister, AK Antony, known for his clean image, has said that India should get the best out of the MMRCA deal. Without mincing words, he has made it clear that the aircraft that would be selected finally would meet all the IAF's requirements. He has also warned against any kind of deviation or impropriety in the selection procedure. Further, he has hinted at ruthless action against any act of corruption or wrong-doing.

Significantly, the MMRCA deal, described as "the mother of all defence deals", carries an offset obligation of 50 per cent of the total value of the final order. To fulfil this obligation, some of the vendors in the race have signed agreements with Indian industrial outfits and IT and software companies for joint development, co-production, technology transfer, and supply of compo-

The offset clause forming part of the defence acquisition programme will expose Indian industries to emerging technologies and innovative manufacturing practices so that their expertise level could be scaled up to the best

PHOTO: Frans Dely COPYRIGHT GRIPEN INTERNATIONAL

The Gripen SA 01 (left) and the Rafale: wing-to-wing competition

nents and services. The Defence Ministry is of the view that the offset clause forming part of the defence acquisition programme will expose Indian industries to many of the new and emerging technologies and innovative manufacturing practices so that their expertise level could be scaled up to the best in the world.

AS things stand now, the IAF is keen on a double engine fighting machine since it makes for a higher level of reliability and safety besides being useful in covering vast distances and operating smoothly under widely varying climatic and topographic conditions. Stealth, cruise speed and scope for technological upgradation are other factors the IAF would weigh before zeroing in on the aircraft best suited to meet its needs. The IAF would need to make sure that the fighter, its engine and weapons systems are state-of-the-art and can be upgraded without heavy investment or complicated and time consuming modifications.

Also in focus will be other vital issues such as stability, range, endurance and operational efficiency. As part of the selection procedure, the IAF will also thoroughly evaluate the systems onboard the aircraft, including radars, navigation and avionics equipment, self-defence suites and electronics warfare devices. More important, the IAF will for the first time work out the actual cost of the ownership of each fighter jet. The IAF will take into account the reliability of quality spares supply and maintenance support on time.

On another front, the IAF also expects the finally selected aircraft to have a lifespan of 40 years and well equipped to carry out defence and ground attack as well as reconnaissance operations in addition to possessing the capability of mid-air refuelling. The IAF will also consider issues like training, infrastructure and leveraging the geopolitical advantage of the deal. In the ultimate analysis, the selected aircraft should give the IAF a clear-cut edge in projecting its power in the Indian Ocean and South China region. This implies that the aircraft should have a longer range and be equipped with systems like AESA radar.

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The MMRCA along with the Russian origin Su-30 MKI and India's home-grown Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), which is some time away from induction into service, will constitute the mainstay of the frontline fighter fleet of the IAF. It was the rapid depletion of the combat aircraft squadron owing to phasing out of the ageing MiG-21s along with inordinate delay in the qualification of Tejas that prodded the IAF to go in for the MMRCA. Meanwhile, as a contingency measure aimed at bolstering its operational preparedness, the IAF ordered 40 Su-30s from Russia in fast-track mode. Recently, Antony informed Parliament that by 2015, the IAF will have as many as 230 Su-30s, considered a versatile and formidable frontline fighter. g

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Chaos in the streets

There is no magic formula to solve the problem—only drastic measures

by PS Bhatnagar

DELHI has 5.6 million vehicles on its 1,122 km (as of 2001) of roads, which occupy 21 per cent of its landmass. Of these, 1.8 to 2 million are four-wheelers. The number of vehicles in Delhi is much more than the combined vehicle population of Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. Some of the roads are eight-laned and there are several flyovers or underbridges, overbridges and bypasses and clover leaves – built over the past 30 years to facilitate and accelerate movement.

The total length of the roads is expected to go up to 1,340 km by 2021. Delhi's population, which was 12.79 million in 2001, is expected to reach 23 million by 2021. Buses will increase by two-and-a-half times while cars will increase three times. Delhi adds 2,00,000 personalized motorized vehicles every year. Thus, while the roads will increase marginally (and there is a limit up to which they can increase!) the population will more than double and the number of vehicles will grow even faster.

How then can Delhi roads cope with this massive hike in the automobile population?

The Metro rail will surely take away part of the burden but it grows slowly and at heavy costs and one has seen how much resistance there is from various lobbies to its free expansion. Environmentalists, status-quoists and the so-called preservationists raise objections and the projects get delayed. It must be acknowledged with gratitude on behalf of Delhiites that the Metro has grown fairly quickly despite all the hurdles and has become one of the most frequented modes of transport in Delhi. But very

The Metro rail will surely take away part of the burden but it grows slowly and at heavy costs and one has seen how much resistance there is from various lobbies to its free expansion.

Radical steps required

WE cannot restrict the inflow of population to Delhi but we can certainly restrict the addition of vehicles. This is done in many countries, notably Singapore. In Delhi also, while the first car for a family (and family should be suitably and restrictively defined) should be taxed at normal rates, the second car should be taxed at prohibitive rates. One family in my colony, living in one house, has 14 cars, most of them parked outside. Why does each member of the family need a separate car, which is almost always parked on public space?

All car-owning houses, by and large, have or are supposed to have parking spaces within their compound. Yet almost all colony roads are choked with cars parked on the roadside. All cars parked outside the houses on municipal land should be required to pay a parking fee. This, even at the moderate rate of Rs 100 per car per month, would bring a huge income to the MCD. An estimated 1.15 million cars exist in Delhi. Even if half the number of cars are parked on the roadside, an estimated revenue of Rs 69 crore per annum would accrue.

Building plans of any construction, commercial or residential, should be rejected if a sufficient number of parking spaces are not provided for vehicles. Those constructions where such spaces are not available should either be forced to create such spaces or should be compelled to pay heavily for using municipal space.

Rates of parking in municipal sites should be steeply revised and enforced. In Hong Kong, people pay HK$15 per hour (about Rs 90) for using such a facility. In Delhi, people pay Rs 10 for unlimited parking time. I know of people who leave

SHARAD SAXENA

few, if any, have given up use of their personal transport in favour of the Metro.

Other modes are being explored, examined and are "under consideration" for years. Decisions on them are not taken quickly because there are so many authorities and so many lobbies involved and any one of them is enough to halt or delay the project. I remember that a presentation for the Sky Rail was made way back in 2001 but it still remains "under examination". Another scheme by a private automotive multinational which offered to run 10,000 air-conditioned buses, replacing them gradually over every four years, was stalled on condition that fares will be fixed by the government and would have to be competitive with those of the Delhi Transport Corporation. Bus Rapid Transport (BRT), a hair-brained scheme from the beginning, with all the heavy costs involved, is hardly a solution for a city the size of Delhi.

Also, let us not forget that Delhi has a multitude of transport modes. Buses, trucks (although they are not supposed to enter Delhi during peak hours, according to a Supreme Court order), light heavy vehicles, cars, taxis, *phut phut*s, three-wheeler scooter rickshaws, two-wheeler scooters and motorcycles (almost no traffic rules apply to them and they can overtake you from left, right or wherever), bicycles and *tonga*s, not to overlook the herds of cattle that may suddenly emerge on the road from nowhere. Compared to other metropolitan cities, Delhiites are given to ignoring traffic rules with far greater nonchalance. All this complicates an already messy problem.

THE number of accidents and fatalities on Delhi roads is already something to worry about and, despite the harsh intervention of the courts, there is no improvement. There are just too many vehicles on the roads and too many traffic jams. Most people have time schedules and/or deadlines to meet. Everybody tries to get ahead and accidents are a natural consequence. If the number of vehicles continues to grow, accidents will only increase. No wonder road rage cases are multiplying.

Ad hoc steps like starting of new transport schemes, checking drunken driving for a few days, enforcing more traffic discipline, or putting red lights at crossings with the word "RELAX" are no solutions, only publicity stunts. These in any case have to be made a regular feature of our traffic work. g

(The writer is a former Chief Secretary of the Delhi government)

their cars at the railway station for days and go out of station. At the airports, we pay Rs 130.

To bring symmetry and a system to running of buses, two or three large operators should be invited to run the buses, replace them on a regular basis and charge market-competitive fares. Delhi Transport Corporation could be allowed to continue its services with only its own buses and charge whatever rates. The experience of charter buses has shown that people are willing to pay more for convenience. Blue Lines, and other Lines, should be abolished. The number of buses, according to a 2004 estimate, was 53,000 and this should be gradually brought down instead of being allowed to go up.

If the New Delhi Municipal Corporation could ban cycle rickshaws and *tonga*s, why can't it be done in all of Delhi? The question of providing them alternative employment should be examined simultaneously.

Instead of providing a separate corridor for High Capacity Buses (BRT), planning should be done for a separate corridor for cyclists. This will cause much less expense and confusion. Users of cycles on a regular basis remain numerous and this step will only encourage the use of this environmentally friendly mode of transport.

The Metro Rail should be encouraged and provided all necessary clearances to expand rapidly and a high-level fully-empowered group should remove all hurdles in its way.

The encroachments on Delhi roads should be removed with a heavy hand. Traffic movement on even wide roads is restricted because substantial parts of the roads are encroached upon by vendors, shopkeepers and illegal parking.

Facing new C

With farmers hit by drought, Assembly elections two mont the ante, the Maratha supremo cannot afford to dawdle

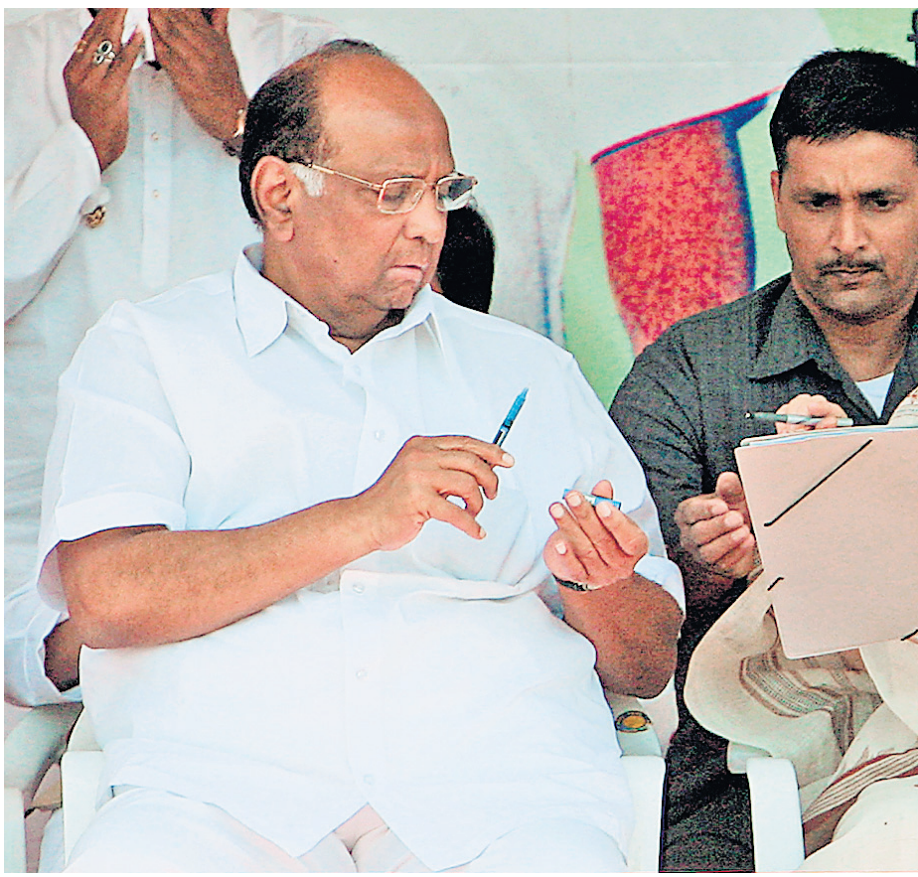
by TR Ramachandran

SHARADCHANDRA Govindrao Pawar or Sharad Pawar, as he is popularly known, is a politician for all seasons. Wily, pragmatic and never one to let an opportunity go by, he has been on the national scene for a quarter of a century besides making his mark as one of the three most popular leaders of Maharashtra after YB Chavan and Vasantdada Patil. However, lately he has had to deal with a dwindling of trust among various quarters.

One of these is the farmer segment, hard-hit by recurring drought. With the Assembly elections barely two months away, he cannot afford to dawdle. It is to his advantage that he is in charge of the crucial agriculture portfolio for a second successive term in the Congress-led UPA government. As an agriculturist himself, he is acutely aware of farmers' problems and owes it to them to ease their misery.

Then, some of his never-say-die supporters in the decade-old Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) are today rebelling against his leadership. While he will have the nuisance of containing overambitious leaders in the party ranks at election time, there is no doubting his stranglehold on Maratha politics. Several times, he has defeated vicious efforts to pack him off to political oblivion by vertically splitting the Maratha leadership. Whenever such attempts were made, by Indira Gandhi and then Rajiv Gandhi, the Maratha leader emerged stronger and the self-seekers who had ganged up against him at the behest of the Congress high command invariably cut sorry figures.

He is unfazed by voices in the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee, including former CM Vilasrao Deshmukh, pitching for the party going it alone in the coming Assembly elections. Having built the NCP into a formidable force in



Pawar's strength is that he has retained his individual identity with the NCP being the vehicle. This has helped him retain his grassroots base despite constant efforts since 1962 to divide the Maratha lobby, backed by the sugar cooperatives and the cooperative banks

Maharashtra, Pawar has so far kept his counsel. Yet he is aware of the drawbacks of an NCP-Congress seat-sharing arrangement. There is no doubt that, in any such deal the Congress will get the bulk of the 288 seats with some friendly electoral battles in selected constituencies. And the partner with the

CHALLENGES

months away and rebels raising le

REUTERS

Pawar with Sonia: staying together?

larger number of seats will bag the chief ministership.

With the BJP in a shambles in Maharashtra and the Shiv Sena losing its sheen due to various factors, the break-away Maharashtra Navnirman Samiti (MNS) is seeking to enlarge its sphere of influence. Preliminary discussions are on between the NCP and the Congress for forging a pre-poll alliance. It appears certain that, barring imponderables, the NCP-Congress combine will again be at the helm of affairs in Mumbai. Yet, it must be remembered that Pawar has a reputation for being unpredictable and manipulative.

Pawar's strength is that he has always retained his individual identity with the NCP being the vehicle. This has helped him retain his grassroots base despite constant efforts since 1962 to divide the Maratha lobby, backed by the sugar cooperatives and the cooperative banks. The Maratha lobby is directly linked to the farmers, who are the shareholders of the cooperative banks.

Having fought and overcome oral cancer, Pawar is nowhere near hanging up his boots. He has been Chief Minister four times and this is his sixth term in the Lok Sabha. He has an excellent rapport and understanding with politicians of all hues. He has the ability to swing things in his favour and has readily lent others a helping hand in crisis situations. All this will stand him in good stead.

A believer in the democratic process, Pawar has thrown his hat in the ring for the office of Prime Minister at least twice. He accepted defeat with equanimity. The first time was in 1991, after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, when he emerged as a Prime Ministerial aspirant against PV Narasimha Rao. He had the backing of NKP Salve, Suresh Kalmadi and several others. The discussions on who should be leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, with Sonia Gandhi unwilling to join politics, broke down. Pawar was persuaded not to press his claim by Balram Jakhar and others. When Narasimha Rao became PM, he appointed Pawar Defence Minister. The second time was earlier this year. Pawar had not expected the Congress to secure such an impressive tally in the general election. He quietly backed out as the NCP did not have the numbers to press its claim for the Prime Minister's job.

Pawar had also once contested for the Congress president's post against Sitaram Kesri. He had lost, predictably, and moved on.

In other words Pawar enjoys wide-spread grassroots support. The stakes are indeed high for the 69-year-old Pawar. It is not just the Nehru-Gandhi family, other politicians too are seeking to perpetrate dynastic rule. Pawar is no different having got his daughter Supriya Sule elected to the Lok Sabha from his pocket borough of Baramati.

Pawar has never followed a mentor or senior blindly. A case in point is when YB Chavan, the first Chief Minister of Maharashtra, rejoined the Congress 13 years after the party split in 1969. Pawar did not follow suit.

He entered the Assembly in 1967 from Baramati. The Congress split in 1978 provided him a window to break free and form a coalition government in Maharashtra with the backing of the Janata Party. He headed the Progressive Democratic Front and earned the distinction of being the youngest Chief Minister of Maharashtra. In 1980 when Indira Gandhi rode back to power after being defeated in 1977, she dismissed the PDF government. Subsequently, the Congress won the majority in the Assembly elections and she had AR Antulay installed as CM in a bid to cut Pawar to size. An undeterred Pawar remained a key Opposition leader in the Assembly. It was after this that Pawar made his advent in the Lok Sabha from the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency in 1984. g

AN IAS OFFICER BY CHANCE

The professor-turned-bureaucrat brings alive the flavour of the India and Bengal of half a century ago

MY decision to appear for the Indian Administrative Service examination in 1956 was on an impulse. The thought of joining the bureaucratic ranks of the government had not occurred to me in my student days. Having been brought up in small towns of undivided Bengal, and having gone through the emotional experience associated with the freedom movement, in particular Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India Movement of 1942, and Netaji Subhas Bose's Indian National Army and the trial of the INA officers after the Second World War, I had, as a child, come to associate officialdom with foreign colonial rule.

We used to look upon the sub-division level and district level officials, smartly dressed in western attire, as essentially a symbol of foreign rule and had no particular feeling of admiration for them. This feeling was reinforced during my days in Presidency College. My ambition had always been to join the academic world and go for teaching and research and perhaps also work for public causes. But fate decreed otherwise. After a double "first" in my Honours and MA examinations, and having secured the top position in MA, I was waiting for a job opportunity to come my way for seven months or so. I was simply giving private tuitions to cover my own expenses. After seven months of suspense, I took the IAS examination. Ironically, immediately after I had completed the written examination, I was offered a teaching position in my own college on the recommendation of my guru, the legendary professor of history, Sushobhan Sarkar, who was retiring and who had suggested to the government that I was the best available person to take up the subject he was teaching. Next month, I was selected by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) for a Government of India scholarship for doctoral studies at Oxford University and was also admitted to that university. Had these two developments taken place a few months earlier, I might not have sat for the IAS examination. I did teach for about six months, but having been selected for the IAS, it was very difficult to opt against it, all the more so because of the great prestige the ICS-IAS commanded in our society during those days. Also, there were family circumstances that compelled one to quickly get into the job stream that many of us in post-Partition Bengal faced.

I do not think I have any reason to regret my decision to join the IAS. One great advantage of being in the IAS is that, no matter where you are, you can always contact the local Collector or the Superintendent of Police (SP), the local Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) or the local executive administrator at any level, or the officer in-charge of a police station, and introduce yourself and will get a certain consideration and all possible assistance.

It is this spirit of oneness in the IAS, which has very largely kept India as a country together, irrespective of different political parties ruling different states. There are many occasions when political parties ruling in the states are different from the party that rules at the Centre. But so long as IAS officers are serving in key posts in both the Central and state governments, they understand one another and count upon a civil servant's awareness of the overall national objectives and his commitment to the nation. This understanding always facilitates interaction and negotiations.

On May 1, 1957 I took my last class at Presidency College and on May 15 I left for Delhi to join the IAS which was to remain my life and career for a long period of 35 years and 4 months. Thus I became a part of the steel frame that has supported independent India.

I reached Delhi by train on the evening of May 6, along with another childhood friend who had also been selected for the IAS, to spend one year of training at Metcalfe House in Old Delhi where the IAS Training School was then located. Compared to Calcutta and Bombay, Delhi was very much a small town in those days. I still remember the shock I received when, on arriving at Metcalfe House and asking the bearer for a packet of cigarettes, I was told that

he had to go to Kashmere Gate, five km away, to fetch it. It was barely nine in the evening. But Delhi was still a city which, except for Connaught Circus and the Chandni Chowk-Jama Masjid area, would go to sleep by 8/9 pm and there would scarcely be a passer-by on the main roads. Camel carts and horse-driven *tonga*s were to be seen all over.

The one year at Metcalfe House was indeed a memorable experience, living together with about 70 IAS and IFS probationers and sharing with them various joys and sorrows. Travelling with them to various parts of the country, starting with Kashmir and on to Kanya Kumari, through the Bengal-Bihar industrial belt, and the colourful Rajasthan desert was a unique experience.

We completed our training programme in April 1958 and left for our respective States. I was among a batch of five officers posted to West Bengal. I was to proceed to the district of Murshidabad for my one-year district training as Assistant Magistrate and Collector.

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I took over as Under Secretary (Home) on 24 August, 1960 after my transfer from Diamond Harbour.

I was extremely fortunate in having during my time a very outstanding ICS officer, R Gupta, as Chief Secretary. Before him there had been SN Ray, who had a very long tenure of 13 or 14 years. SN Ray had been an aloof, much-feared Chief Secretary, not readily accessible. Gupta insisted on the Under Secretary seeing all papers and giving his advice/recommendation. This straightaway restored for the US (Home) a position he had not enjoyed any time since independence.

He would keep me involved in top policy matters, and would refer many important people such as senior Central government officials or foreign diplomats and Consul Generals to me for dealing with their problems. Both he and his gracious wife, Mrs Meera Gupta, took a great interest in young IAS officers amd made them feel at ease, with the result that, unlike most of his colleagues in the ICS, he retained the love and affection of so many of those officers till the last days of his life.

FOTOS4INDIA

I was lucky to be involved in two major events in the history of the Indian corporate sector, viz., the abolition of the managing agency in 1969/70 and the enforcement of the MRTP Act, 1970

West Bengal those days was quite different from today. Economically she was among the front-ranking states, and was also politically very important. Towering over everybody else and dominating the entire scenario was the great personality of Dr BC Roy. Since he was also in-charge of the Home Department, I had many occasions to get to know him. A

man of tremendous personality, he would overawe nearly everybody who came in contact with him. Yet he was a person full of humility. He would come to Writers' Building around 8 o'clock in the morning, have his breakfast there and work till late evening. He literally ruled West Bengal like a personal *zamindari* and would expect every major matter to be referred to him.

I returned to the West Bengal Secretariat after a spell of nearly 10 years in 1978. I was Secretary in charge of two departments, Information and Public Relations (subsequently redesigned as Information and Cultural Affairs, and the Department of Youth Services) and, therefore, answerable to two different Ministers, which did create problems at times.

THE Department of Company Affairs (at that time a part of the Ministry of Industry), which I joined in March 1968 as Deputy Secretary, gave me a unique opportunity to be at the centre of the Indian government's formidable economic regulatory system. This was doubly significant because this happened at a time when the thrust of the Central government's policy was changing from one of benign aloofness to massive intervention in corporate business. Industrial licensing was already being tightened.

I was lucky to be involved in two major events in the history of the Indian corporate sector, viz., the abolition of the managing agency in 1969/70 and the enforcement of the MRTP Act, 1970. I was initially involved, among other things, with the appointment of Managing Directors and Directors in public limited companies, and fixation of their remuneration.

After Rajiv Gandhi's assassination the Congress was returned as the largest party. Within a few days I found myself Secretary, Planning Commission with my old boss, Pranab Mukherjee, as Deputy Chairman. I welcomed this appointment as the work of framing the Eighth Five-Year Plan, bedevilled by quick political changes since 1989, was due to be resumed. This gave me a unique and creative experience. It was a fascinating exercise that enabled me to acquire both a macro and micro view of all aspects of our economy and the work of the Ministries of the Government of India as also of the state governments.

On the evening of September 30, 1992, I bade adieu to Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission Pranab Mukherjee and my colleagues in Yojana Bhawan, and indeed to over 35 years of service in the government. On the one hand, there was a great sense of freedom and of relief from the obligation that was imposed 35 years ago in Metcalfe House of being in the service of the government for all 24 hours of the day. On the other hand, there was also a tinge of sadness that I was coming out of the protective umbrella under which I had been from the age of 23. The only privilege I have truly missed outside the government is the access to the Rax telephone system. But above everything else, I felt sorry to have to part company with so many colleagues and friends. Not that we would not continue to be friends, but I would no longer meet them or talk to them almost every day. I would miss them as colleagues. At one of the farewell functions on that day, I quoted from Rabindranath Tagore's song:

"I have returned the key to my door
And surrendered claims to my room
I seek blessings from everyone
For many days have been neighbours
What I have received from them
Is much more than what I have given." g

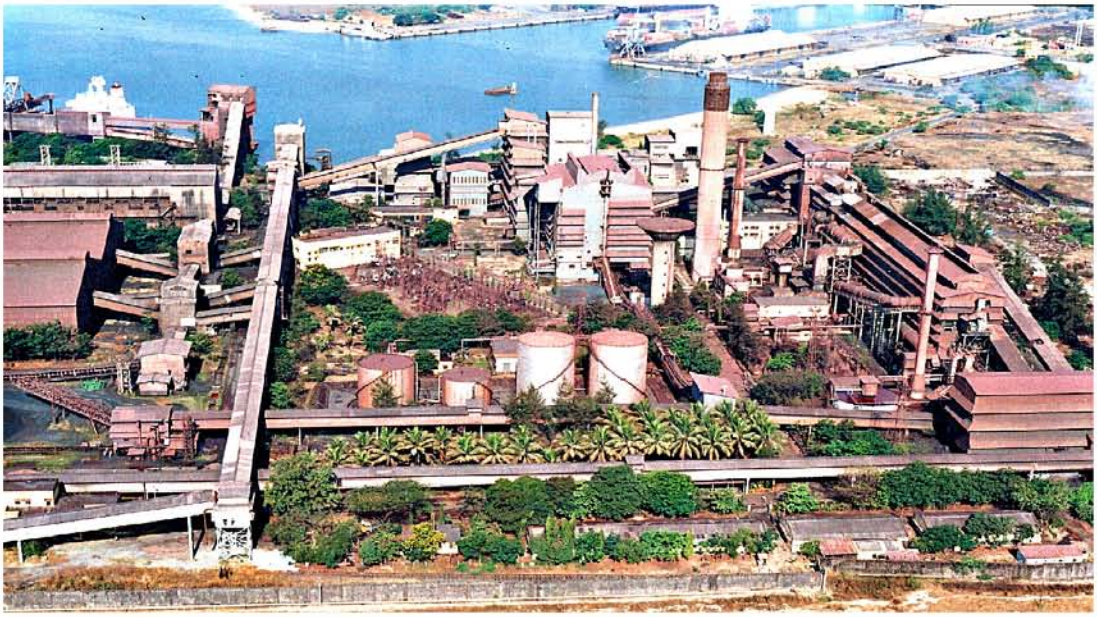
(Edited extract from Inside the Steel Frame, *a memoir by Nitish Sengupta)*

Reminiscences of statesmanship

I SAW Dr BC Roy in action during the entire dispute with Pakistan over Berubari, and saw how he could brush aside even the strong views expressed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. My senior colleague and friend RN Sengupta heard him muttering on the phone to Nehru, "Please do not force me to accept any suggestion about Berubari's transfer to Pakistan until the 1962 elections are over. Otherwise you may have to relieve me and take over as Chief Minister, West Bengal."

Dr Roy with Bulganin (left) and Khrushchev

BUDDHADEV Bhattacharya, the Information and Cultural Affairs Minister, was young but a very high-ranking leader in the state CPI(M) and also reported to be close to the party boss, Promode Das Gupta, who was also the Chairman of the Left Front Committee. I found him well meaning and enthusiastic in his work and developed a good rapport with him. But he was prone to be influenced by some of his partymen outside who were operating in the cultural field or "cultural front" as the leftists were apt to call it.



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The KALANK o

The Vijayan episode spells ruin for both the CPI(M) and it

by Diptendra Raychaudhuri

HE was a perennial symbol of defiance, even when the government of the day apparently survived on his sufferance. He was perceived as a dedicated soldier fighting for values and beliefs that appeared laudable to some and archaic to others. Criticized for arrogance, superciliousness and belligerence, never was he considered unprincipled.

Yet today he stands suddenly dwarfed, stripped of his reputation for honesty. This tale of the rise and moral fall of a leader who ended up according more value to party than principle is that of Prakash Karat.

Karat has failed astoundingly the acid test of 2009, and we are not talking of the Lok Sabha election in which the CPI(M) fared so disastrously. It was a different test altogether that was imposed on him by the deeds of Pinarayi Vijayan, secretary of the Kerala CPI(M).

Vijayan faces prosecution by the CBI for signing, as Kerala Power Minister, a deal with a foreign company that caused a heavy loss to the exchequer and smacked of dishonourable intention. In a party like the CPI(M), known for the simple lifestyle and uprightness of its leaders, that had fought Rajiv Gandhi tooth and nail on the Bofors issue, Vijayan should have been immediately seen as a costly liability.

Like many others, Kerala Chief Minister VS Achuthanandan did see him thus. Achuthanandan is a veteran with an impeccable record of upholding communist values. Many of his actions, such as the movement for reclamation of paddy fields, were unacceptable to non-communist society. His fight against corruption popularized him and led to his becoming Chief Minister in 2006.

For years, trouble had been brewing between the Achuthanandan and Vijayan camps and it came to the surface when Karat sided with Vijayan,

SHARAD SAXENA

Karat: no more spotless?

expelled Achuthanandan from the Politburo and reportedly tried to oust him from chief ministership. He was unsuccessful only due to stiff resistance from Sitaram Yechury, MK Pandhe, Manik Sarkar and Brinda Karat.

This single act has damaged Karat's image beyond repair. Why did he do it? The answer lies in the fact that the Bengal party unit is not wholly with him. Vijayan has absolute control over the party organization in Kerala. By sidelining Achuthanandan, he has ensured Vijayan's mastery of the state organization and loyalty to him.

But the result is that his mindset has been exposed. In his scheme of things, it is not the people who have the last

n Karat

d its General Secretary

say. He should have sided with Achuthanandan after the electoral debacle. But he chose his party organization over the people. Under his aegis, the party has decided to fight the corruption case against Vijayan "politically and legally".

For democratic governance, this is an important matter. What does "politically" fighting a legal case imply? Is it not pressuring the judges? Why should the Election Commission not take cognizance of such an utterance by a political party? Karat's logic means that he can subvert the legal process and democratic functioning to protect his colleague. This is true Stalinist mindset.

But, even in the days of his formidable stature, Karat had always remained an enigma for the people and even the party cadres. He was never a mass leader, unable to win an Assembly election without help from Bengali or Malayali comrades. A Malayali, he began his political career in JNU and then in Delhi politics. He was initiated into Marxism by Victor Kiernan, his professor in Edinburgh, and was a hardliner from the very beginning. He was leader of the Students Federation of India (SFI) and then secretary of the Delhi party unit.

INDUCTED into the Politburo in 1991, Karat did not have much experience of mass movements. But that was not a disadvantage for the then 43-year-old. Leaders of his age group, those below 65, from Bengal and Kerala or any other state, do not boast of meaningful participation in any mass movement either.

Within a few years, he became the representative of the hardcore communists. He utilized the vacuum in the party left by the death and disability of leaders like BT Ranadive and, more relevantly, P Sundaraya. A large section of the district or state leaders of the party believed Harkishen Singh Surjeet and Jyoti Basu were soft on the Congress and eager to compromise with the ruling elite. In Karat they found their man in the Politburo.

From the mid-1990s, Karat also started looking after the organization. It was a laborious job, but he took it to heart. By 1996, he became leader of the majority group in the party and yet showed the magnanimity of asking Surjeet to continue as General Secretary. It was he who led the majority faction in rejecting the proposal from the then Third Front to make Jyoti Basu Prime Minister in 1996. When the issue of whether it was a historic blunder was discussed at the party congress in Kolkata in 1998, he led the defence of the decision and garnered support of two-thirds of the delegates. He became General Secretary because the majority of the Politburo, the Central Committee and the delegates of the party congress wanted it.

Karat's ascendance to the top post was due to a lack of alternative. Nobody else had his three qualifications – command over party organization, a national perspective, and the qualities of an ideologue.

But success has not been his thereafter. He withdrew support from the Central government on an elitist issue and failed to relate it to the masses. Earlier, he failed to prevent the Bengal party from committing the Nandigram fiasco. He failed to check the civil war within the Kerala unit. And topping it all was the electoral debacle that was apparent even before the election was announced.

The *cul de grace* was the Vijayan episode. None can say whether he or his party will be able to rise from it. g

Karat's ascendance to the top post was due to a lack of alternative. Nobody else had his three qualifications – command over party organization, a national perspective, and the qualities of an ideologue

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For the complete list, see www.indianbuzz.com

TRACKING

For a complete list of appointments & retirements, see www.indianbuzz.com

SHANTANU CONSUL
The 1974-batch IAS officer of the Karnataka cadre has been appointed Secretary, Department of Personnel & Training.

RAJEEV SHARMA
The 1984-batch IDES officer has become Director in the National Institute of Disaster Management.

SANJEEV KUMAR
The 1983-batch IRS officer is now Director, Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances.

AJAY SEHGAL
The 1986-batch IFS officer of the UP cadre has joined as Deputy Director, PGIMER in the Ministry of Health.

TCA RAGHAVAN
The 1986-batch IFS officer of UP cadre has been appointed High Commissioner of India to Singapore.

VISHNU NAMDEO HADE
The IFS officer, Ambassador to Panama, has been concurrently accredited as Ambassador to the Honduras with residence in Panama.

NARENDRA KUMAR
The 1989-batch IAS officer of the UT cadre is now Joint Secretary and Director, National Authority for Chemicals Weapons Convention under the Cabinet Secretariat.

NITISHWAR KUMAR
The 1996-batch IAS officer of the UP cadre has been appointed District Magistrate, Pratapgarh.

AJAY KUMAR SINGH
The 1998-batch IAS officer of the UP cadre has become DM of Shrawasti.

GURJIT SINGH
The 1980-batch IFS officer has joined as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs' ERS division.

JK KHANNA
The 1975-batch IPS officer of the Bihar cadre has been appointed DG, Civil Defence, Bihar.

B ASHOK
The 1998-batch IAS officer of the Kerala cadre is now Private Secretary to Minister of State for Agriculture and Cooperation KV Thomas.

SHAILENDRA AGRAWAL
The 1984-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre has been posted as Secretary, Finance of Rajasthan.

SWAPAN SAHA
The 1995-batch IAS officer of the Manipur-Tripura cadre has been appointed DC of South Tripura.

GS VEDI
The 1976-batch IAS officer of the Andhra Pradesh cadre is now Chairman and Managing Director of Punjab and Sindh Bank.

D RAVI
The 1989-batch IFS officer has joined as Joint Secretary in the LAC division of the MEA.

VIJAY LAXMI GUPTA
The 1974-batch IDAS officer has been appointed to the Telecom Commission as Member (Finance).

SUDHIR SAXENA
The 1987-batch IAS officer of the Madhya Pradesh cadre has been posted as IG (Security and Coordination), Madhya Pradesh Bhawan, New Delhi.

NARENDER KUMAR
The 1988-batch IAS officer of the AGMUT cadre has been appointed Secretary to the Governor of Goa.

RAM SEWAK SHARMA
The 1978-batch IAS officer of the Jharkhand cadre is now officer on board with Nandan Nilekani in the Planning Commission.

VIMLENDRA SHARAN
The 1992-batch IAS officer of the Maharashtra cadre is now Private Secretary to Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar.

BEVIS A COUTINHO
The 1977-batch IAS officer of the Karnataka cadre is now Additional Secretary, Inter-State Council.

GOKUL RAM
The 1974-batch IAS officer of the Karnataka cadre has been appointed OSD in the Cabinet Secretariat.

RUDRA GANGADHARAN
The 1975-batch IAS officer of the Kerala cadre is now Secretary, Animal Husbandry in the Government of India.

SANJAY SETHI
The 1992-batch IAS officer of the Maharashtra cadre has joined the Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission (MERC).

PADAMVIR SINGH
The 1977-batch IAS officer of the Madhya Pradesh cadre is now Director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration.

ASHOK KUMAR AMROHI
The 1981-batch IFS officer has been appointed High Commissioner to Mozambique.

Moving On: ias and ips officers retiring in September 2009

ANDHRA PRADESH
Virendra Prakash Jauhari (1972)
P Ramakanth Reddy (1973)

HARYANA
Pradeep Kumar (1972)
Ravinder Nath Prasher (1975)

KARNATAKA
Sudhakar Rao (1973)

MANIPUR-TRIPURA
Jarnail Singh (1974)

ORISSA
Rabindra N Dash (1995)

PUNJAB
Tejinder Kaur (1973)
Ramesh Inder Singh (1974)

UTTAR PRADESH
Naresh Dayal (1972)
Siddhartha Behura (1973)
Dileep Sahay (1993)
Santosh K Srivastava (1996)

UNION TERRITORY
GP Sewalia (1974)

WEST BENGAL
KS Bandhopadhyay (1993)

ips

MADHYA PRADESH
SK Sharma (1992)

KARNATAKA
SK Venugopal (1988)

RAJASTHAN
GC Gupta (1993)

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Be selective, and look ahead

THE markets, despite showing very high volatility in the recent past, have remained almost at the same level even after three months when the Nifty breached the 4,600 mark in early June in the post-election scenario with the formation of a stable government. However, post-Budget the markets nosedived to breach a level of 4,000 but soon regained to touch the new high in early August. The market has been unable to take a decisive course for some time now.

The stable government has initiated the process of reforms starting with disinvestments, announcement of a liberal direct tax code and the likelihood of goods and services tax to be introduced soon. The rise in index of industrial production (IIP) by 7.8 per cent has been the highest in the last 16 months, beating the forecasts by a wide margin, and was substantially higher compared with the growth rate of just 2 per cent in May and 0.4 per cent in April this year. This has been possible due to the stimulus spending by the government and higher salaries of government employees that boosted consumer demand.

But the impact of the drought may start showing in the manufacturing demand nearing the harvest time of end-September and early October. The monsoon has been about 30 per cent below normal. This has triggered a sharp rise in food prices and it is feared that this will raise the inflation rate to about 6 per cent by the end of this fiscal as against the earlier forecasts of 4 per cent. Due to this, the growth rate of Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE), which has fallen to 2.9 per cent in 2008-09 from 8.5 per cent, is likely to be further impacted.

The situation abroad has some redeeming features with the US Federal Reserve saying that the US economy is "levelling out". Though economic activity is likely to remain weak for now, the policy actions to stabilize the financial markets and institutions with fiscal and monetary stimulus will make the market forces contribute to a gradual resumption of sustainable economic growth with price stability. Weak recovery and loose monetary policy can therefore prove to be an ideal combination for high liquidity and rising risk appetite to support various asset classes, especially equities. Chinese markets, however, remain a matter of concern.

Back home, investors see little reason for stock prices to appreciate further after having risen almost 90 per cent in five months when the global economy, mainly US, still remains uncertain. The recent rush by promoters to sell stakes through public offers and private placements lends credence to this theory. The June quarter performance of the corporate sector has been encouraging, mainly due to falling raw material costs and lower operating expenses. The corporate sector has to register a robust growth in revenues and profits to justify the present valuations with the Nifty trading around 20 times the EPS of the trailing four quarters. This is about 25 per cent higher than its 10-year average valuation of around 16 times.

The earnings outlook is far from rosy with rural demand, robust so far, also likely to come under pressure due to the failing monsoon and high food inflation

However, the earnings outlook is far from rosy with rural demand, robust so far, also likely to come under pressure due to the failing monsoon and high food inflation. Investors are therefore advised to use caution in the short- to medium-term and buy only selectively with a long-term perspective.

Navin Flourine

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THE company has been operating the largest integrated fluorochemical plant in India since 1967. There are three segments to its business – specialty fluorochemicals, bulk fluoride and refrigerants mainly used by agrochemical, pharmaceutical, petrochemical, personal care, metals and refrigeration industry. The company continues to get large carbon credits for phasing out CFC under the Kyoto Protocol for which it is implementing a clean development mechanism project entitling it to receive 2.8 m carbon credits annually, assuring a certain amount of cash flow for the next 10 years. Assuming an average price of $12, the annual inflow would be Rs 161 crore, translating into pre-tax Rs 159 per share. Huge free cash, zero debt and higher dividends (with a dividend yield of around 5 per cent) puts the company on a strong foothold. With a likely PBT of Rs 150-160 crore against the market cap of slightly over Rs 200 crore, the stock could witness a re-rating with every quarter of good performance and possibility of buy-back. Expectation of substantial recovery of dues from the group company, Mafatlal Industries and valuable property at Mafatlal Centre, Nariman Point could be further triggers. Accumulate the stock for decent returns. g

The author has no exposure in the stock recommended in this column. gfiles does not accept responsibility for investment decisions by readers of this column. Investment-related queries may be sent to gfilesindia@gmail.com with Dr Sood's name in the subject line.

PMO, Cab Sec wringing hands over Ministers

THE seniormost bureaucrat in the country has recently had yet another headache added to his Pandora's box of problems plaguing the government's workload. Cabinet Secretary KM Chandrasekhar has

ILLUSTRATIONS: ARUNA

been writing letters to the Union Council of Ministers to impress upon them the need to make public their assets and liabilities. But the Ministers chose to sit on the issue. So the Cabinet Secretary was forced to send a second letter as a reminder. Many of the Ministers belonging to the Congress have not even shown the Cabinet Secretary the courtesy of responding to his letters. A little bird tells us that the Prime Minister's Office is worried about the attitude of these public figures.

Unequal work for equal pay

THE politicization of the UP bureaucracy hits one in the face. Departments like General Administration, National Integration, Programme Implementation and Language have an army of officers virtually without work. General Administration has only one section, but the department has a Principal Secretary, two Secretaries and two Special Secretaries. On an average, one or two files come to their desks in a week.

Now, if anyone thinks the UP government is overstaffed, they are wrong. Look at Vijay Shankar Pandey, who is Additional Cabinet Secretary, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, and Principal Secretary, Information

Department. Shailesh Krishna is Principal Secretary to CM, apart from being in charge of Disabled Welfare. Nat Ram, another PS to CM, also has charge of Excise, Sugar Industries and Sugar Development. Kamran Rizwi is Secretary to CM and also in charge of Higher Education and Secretariat Administration.

Navneet Sahgal is Secretary to CM while heading more than half a dozen departments. JN Chamber is Principal Secretary, Small Scale Industries and also looks after Programme Implementation, Textiles and Planning. Pankaj Agrawal has dual charge of transport and the UP SRTC. Awanish Awasthi is Secretary, Tourism and MD, Tourism Development Corporation, and manages Language and Culture.

The list can go on but the point is made.

Is Bhide in IMF race?

UNION Revenue Secretary PV Bhide, who is due to retire in February next year and has gone on leave, might be considered for the post of Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund. However, since there are two other contenders, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will take a call once the time comes. The PMO wants to send a Foreign Service officer to the post.

Meanwhile, a race is on

for the post of Union Health Secretary among three officers – Deepak Gupta (1974, Jharkhand cadre), S Jalaja (1974, Bihar cadre) and Sujatha Rao (1974, Andhra Pradesh cadre). The last is the daughter of former Union Minister KL Rao, who had mooted the idea of interlinking the rivers of the country.

With Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad known to encourage efficient women officers, and with swine flu in the headlines, she might well become the top civil servant in the Health Ministry. The ministry is not new to her as she has done an extended stint there before.

Dr Singh's bid to heal the plague

THE long process of consultation is the disease that afflicts bureaucratic work. The doctor in the PMO, Dr Singh, wants to treat the disease. So a super group under Principal Secretary TKA Kutty Nair has been brought into the PMO. Amitabh Kant, the IPS officer of the 1980 Kerala batch and the man behind the "Incredible India" campaign that rejuvenated the tourism industry, has also been roped in.

The group will minimize the time spent on consultation regarding important developmental projects. The PM is dissatisfied with the speed of developmental work. The implementation process gets mired in procedural obstacles. Only time will tell if Dr Singh's prescription will work. g

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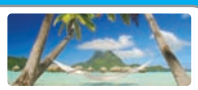

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